

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing Mercy, Sacrifice, and a little bit of Faith.

I would encourage you to go to <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info> as I continue to update the site. I have links to several specific features below. Let me know what you think, whether you have any suggestions, or any requests.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

You can view previous editions of The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN) in PDF (Portable Document Format) at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/TheGospelNotesNewsletter>

Or you can access other educational/informational/inspirational resources at <https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources>

You can find the current preaching schedule for the Springfield, Missouri Restoration Branch at https://thechurchofjesuschrist.info/Resources/Service_Schedule.php

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Romans 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

1 Samuel 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

3 Nephi 4

48 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.

49 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings; and ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

50 And whoso cometh unto me with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, him will I baptize with fire and with the Holy Ghost, even as the Lamanites, because of their faith in me at the time of their conversion, were baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, and they knew it not.

51 Behold, I have come unto the world to bring redemption unto the world, to save the world from sin; therefore, whoso repenteth and cometh unto me as a little child, him will I receive; for of such is the kingdom of God.

52 Behold, for such I have laid down my life and have taken it up again; therefore, repent, and come unto me, ye ends of the earth, and be saved.

53 And now, behold, it came to pass that all the people of the land did hear these sayings and did witness of it.

There is a certain truism that the next generation cannot appreciate the sacrifices of the previous generation. As the circumstances of life change, so too do the things that are considered to be sacrifices. That truism is predicated on how each generation faces somewhat different challenges.

As Christians we fancy ourselves to be somewhat experts on the nature of what Christ has done for us. We depend on his sacrifice for our salvation and thus we believe we naturally have a great appreciation for what that involved, but I suspect that what people understand about sacrifice, and Christ's sacrifice particularly, may be rather more limited to a surface appreciation for something which is truly very deep and impactful.

A very basic statement of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that because of man's fall in the garden, Jesus had to be born, live, be crucified and resurrected so that we might have the opportunity for eternal life with him. Basic though it may be, that is only how deep it goes for some since they consider that to be all they need to know. Though it is important to understand these basic things, I think Jesus wanted us to understand things more thoroughly so that we could appreciate – and worship – with a more full and true spiritual intent than we might otherwise do with just the minimal understanding that we started with.

As Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, referring to what Moses told the people of his day, the Lord will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. That gives us the suggestion that the

sacrifices we offer may not always be sufficient to receive mercy. There are times when the Lord does **not** accept our sacrifices, and these often have to do with the intent behind the sacrifice, how we offer that sacrifice, and what we offer for a sacrifice.

The idea that the Lord changed the order of operations in terms of sacrifice in the New Covenant as compared with the Old Covenant seems to have taken on a life of its own with Christians in particular. After all, it is clear that under the Old Covenant ancient Israel had to offer sacrifices of rams and bullocks and other such things that brought both blood and death before the Lord would accept it. The entire set of books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy detail sacrifice after sacrifice for all kinds of things that they should offer under the law of Moses. But in the New Testament these things are done away because the law concerning them was fulfilled in Christ. So, many accept this and move on to believe that sacrifice no longer requires anything significant to be done on our part. But this idea is so diametrically opposed to the truth that it is hard to know where to start in expressing just how wrong it is.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to start with understanding what sacrifice is. In terms of the scriptures, and perhaps how I can best summarize it in a few words, I would define it this way:

Sacrifice: to take something of equal or lesser value in exchange for something of equal or greater value.

This surely sounds like an economic statement (and a largely unbalanced one at that), and indeed many refer to the sacrificial laws of the Old Covenant as “the Mosaic economy.” The people would offer the sacrifice of their animals according to the prescribed steps, and they would receive the greater response of mercy and forgiveness of sins. But if you believe that the sacrifice of animals is what was offered as the true sacrifice, you would be mistaken. Of course, that was a significant and undeniable part of what they were required to do, but the more important element of this process of sacrifice was their willingness to accept that they had sins and that they needed to change something in order for those sacrifices to be accepted by the Lord. If they did not become humble enough to bring these offerings, they did little to accomplish what they were intended to do.

The Israelites under the law of Moses could not just go out into their barnyard and pick any animal for sacrifice. They had to have specific characteristics – they had to be the best of the best in their herds, and they had to be the cleanest of the clean. This was no small feat. If they chose the wrong animals or didn’t follow the right steps like sequestering those that would be offered prior to their sacrifice, it could bring severe consequences upon not just

that family, but upon the priests and Israel as a whole. This required a determined effort to do things the right way or risk perhaps even death itself.

The animals, as we Christians know, were only a representation of the true sacrifice that Christ would offer for us, but even with this knowledge it seems that this is taken for granted rather than appreciating just how deeply this goes into the principles of the Gospel.

Let's think about this for a second. If my earlier definition is correct, (referring to how sacrifice is an exchange of sorts,) we find that there seems to be a mixture of two principles in what we offer.

- 1.) That what we offer in sacrifice must be less than what Christ offers to us.
- 2.) That what we offer in sacrifice is in obedience to the commandments Christ has given us.

Item #1 above is clearly what most Christians accept and believe. It is repeated over and over again today that there is no work we can do that will bring us salvation – it must be given to us by Jesus. That is clearly also true, but that is not the whole story. Nevertheless, on its face this is true – that what we can offer to the Lord is not as great as what he can give us.

It is #2 above that I believe we often miss. It's easy to miss, but think again about what Samuel said – "...Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Let's not forget Jesus told the Nephites at the time of the great cataclysms when the crucifixion took place –

3 Nephi 4:49 And ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings; and ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit.

If you get the idea that the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit is a new concept first introduced by Jesus in the New Testament, you would be mistaken.

Psalms 34:18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

Psalms 51:17 **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.**

Isaiah 57:15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

What does this mean? If David correctly stated that the sacrifice of God – a thousand years before Christ came in the flesh – was to offer a broken heart and contrite spirit, then did all those animal sacrifices serve no real purpose? Was the function of the law of Moses just to shackle the people with a law that had no meaning or value? Were all of those animal sacrifices unnecessary – the many thousands which had to be offered by Israel for over a thousand years?

If we think in modern terms, consider that before there were national or state speed limits for driving on highways in the United States, people were free to drive as fast as they wanted to. But as time progressed it was found that people could not be good judges as to what a safe speed was, so speed limits were introduced to make sure people did not accidentally either get killed or kill others or cause property damage because of ignorance of what safe travel speeds were. Laws were introduced to set limits on how fast people should travel so that everyone could understand what is practical and safe in the presence of others. That was the intent of the law, and today most can recognize that it is a law that frustrates many people and causes them to go on a bit of a rebellious streak. Such was the law of Moses in its day. The intent of the law of Moses was to teach people what is good and right and to show them what is important, but in time it became corrupted into something that was an end unto itself. Like the law of Moses, many now view speed limit laws as ends unto themselves rather than something to provide helpful guidance to those that do not know what is a safe speed to drive.

While that example is perhaps rather basic, it shows us that without an appreciation for the function, purpose and operation of the law, we must be stuck with the need to be obedient to it at the risk of consequences we don't wish to have.

If we view the sacrifices of cows as just one way to feed the priests of Israel, we miss the objective view that these things were never ours to keep for ourselves – they were given to us by God and it is within his purview to decide how they should be used. The sacrifice here is the sacrifice of humility – contriteness - in recognition that we have nothing of physical value that God hasn't provided for us in the first place. It is also instantiated by the need to recognize that we have violated the law by the commission of sins, and that is part of the broken heart that we offer, though not entirely what it consists of. A broken heart also comes from the suffering we have within ourselves for things we have lost, or, things we have wanted rightly but were denied. The broken heart is an appeal for the grace and mercy of God to help where we have lacked.

A broken heart and contrite spirit is the motivation behind the physical sacrificial laws. It is the spiritual side of the law which the law of Moses could not dictate, and because of this the law of Moses could neither accommodate nor supersede it. As such the sacrifice of a

broken heart and contrite spirit could not be written into the law of Moses. Thus, when the law of Moses was fulfilled in Christ, the sacrifice of broken heart and contrite spirit was not done away.

Let's look further at what Jesus told the disciples during his visit to them in the new world –

3 Nephi 7

4 And he said unto them, Marvel not that I said unto you that old things had passed away and that all things had become new.

5 Behold, **I say unto you that the law is fulfilled that was given unto Moses.**

6 Behold, I am he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel; therefore, the law in me is fulfilled, for I have come to fulfill the law; therefore, it hath an end.

7 Behold, I do not destroy the prophets, for as many as have not been fulfilled in me, verily, I say unto you, shall all be fulfilled.

8 And because I said unto you that old things hath passed away, I do not destroy that which hath been spoken concerning things which are to come.

9 For behold, the covenant which I have made with my people is not all fulfilled; **but the law which was given unto Moses hath an end in me.**

10 Behold, **I am the law and the light; look unto me and endure to the end, and ye shall live; for unto him that endureth to the end will I give eternal life.**

11 Behold, I have given unto you the commandments; therefore, keep my commandments.

12 And this is the law and the prophets, for they truly testified of me.

We will be quick to notice here that Jesus did **not** say, "...unto him that keeps sacrificing to the end will I give eternal life." Remember, Samuel said, "...to obey is better than sacrifice..." which tells us that sacrifice alone is not sufficient for us to be saved.

Obedience is superior to sacrifice. In fairness, sacrifice is a commandment, as we saw earlier, namely, "...and ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit." In this respect we can see that obedience **is** a sacrifice (or, perhaps stated a different way, sacrifice can be a form of obedience) because by it we do things that we might not otherwise **want** to do. But if that obedience means there is no sin, then sacrifice is not needed for sin, but for the fulfillment of the law.

When Jesus was baptized, it was clear to John that Jesus was without sin, and therefore baptism for the remission of sins would do nothing for Jesus. Rather, it was his obedience to the law -not the law of Moses- but the law of righteousness, that was to fulfill all righteousness.

Matthew 3 (King James Version)

14 But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?

15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Matthew 3 (Inspired Version)

42 But John refused him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee. And why comest thou to me?

43 And Jesus, answering, said unto him, Suffer me to be baptized of thee, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

The nature of repentance is that of cessation of one thing that is sinful and the replacement of it with something that is holy or good. Repentance, therefore, is both sacrifice and obedience rolled up into one term. Therefore we read in the scriptures this:

3 Nephi 12:33 Now this is the commandment: Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, that ye may be sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost, that ye may stand spotless before me at the last day.

Ether 1:115 Therefore, repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name; for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned; and signs shall follow them that believe in my name.

Moroni 7:36 And he hath said, Repent, all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and be baptized in my name, and have faith in me, that ye may be saved.

Where sin is involved, if the proper sacrifice is made, then mercy is granted. Mercy is another subject that we often hear Christians speak about as something we can assume to be applied to us if we believe in Christ. But we also know that belief in Christ is only one of many elements of the Gospel of Christ. We know this because of the following:

James 2:19 Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble; thou hast made thyself like unto them, not being justified.

Jude 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

This stands the test of time. The devils not only believe but have a perfect knowledge of God – their first estate was the place where God dwelt – heaven. This was given by the prophet Isaiah, and Jesus also shared this knowledge with the apostles:

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

Luke 10:19 And he said unto them, As lightning falleth from heaven, I beheld Satan also falling.

The Lord will not have mercy on the angels who left their first estate. There can be no sacrifice for them. It is their perfect knowledge that condemns them after the rebellion they participated in. The same is true of us if we willfully rebel after having received a knowledge of the truth

Hebrews 10

26 For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

Though sacrifices may be offered, the Lord “will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” Mercy in the form of the forgiveness of sins is what we hope to receive after all the offerings we can make of broken hearts and contrite spirits. The knowledge of what we truly offer the Lord for a sacrifice is what bears consideration, as we know that perfect and true judgment can only take place when there is a perfect and true knowledge. It is this knowledge that will be used to justify the ones that have sought diligently after the Lord from those that did not.

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied; by **his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for he shall bear their iniquities.**

We are careful to note that Jesus will not justify “all,” but he will justify “many” because he knows those whom his sacrifice will be sufficient for – they that have offered the offering he commands.

Psalms 50

4 He shall call to the heavens from above and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

5 Gather my saints together unto me, those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

Psalms 15

1 Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill of Zion?

2 He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart;

3 He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor,

4 In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord, sweareth not falsely to hurt any man, and changeth not;

5 He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

It is not named as such in Psalms 50, but this is an offering of obedience. Offerings of obedience are not without precedent in the law of Moses either, because there were

sacrifices that people were instructed to make that were not related to the commission of sins. Think of these verses in particular:

Leviticus 23:38 Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside **your gifts**, and beside all **your vows**, and beside all **your freewill offerings**, which ye give unto the Lord.

Numbers 15:3 And will make an offering by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in **your solemn feasts**, to make a sweet savor unto the Lord, of the herd or of the flock,

Numbers 29:39 These things ye shall do unto the Lord in your set feasts, beside your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for **your meat offerings**, and for **your drink offerings**, and for **your peace offerings**.

Deuteronomy 12:6 And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and **your tithes**, and **heave offerings** of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks;

Deuteronomy 12:17 Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn, or of thy wine, or of thy oil, or the firstlings of thy herds or of thy flock, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand;

This is just a small listing out of the total, but you get the idea that not all sacrifices were intended to be sacrifices because of sin. Freewill offerings, tithes (to a greater or lesser extent), peace offerings, and others certainly involved animal sacrifices, but they were not all necessarily to be offered for specific or general sins. Instead, it was their form of obedience to worship the Lord out of a willing heart. Though this was prescribed to be done in a certain way, it was their way of expressing diligence and obedience to the Lord even when there weren't sins intruding upon their worship.

This was obedience because of a true desire to worship, and though their way of expressing this through the law of Moses involved the sacrifice of animals, it was their devotion and goodwill that was the motivation behind it. That motivation remains present today without the need to bring a sacrifice of animals to the altar. If nothing else, this is a faith-based expression. That is to say, it was performed on the basis of faith and not the necessity of receiving forgiveness.

Yet faith is an undeniable pleasure to God. He loves when his people have faith in him, as Timothy writes in the letter to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

It is not just mercy that we need to desire, but it is the pleasing of God that we should also desire. Justification by faith, as Paul writes, is what made Abraham a friend of God. Abraham offered his service to God because of his faith, and this pleased God. His offerings for sin were necessary because of the sin in his life, but his faith pleased God beyond any mercy that was granted. Let there be no mistake though – Abraham had sins

that he had to offer sacrifice for. Abraham's faithful obedience to the command of God is what made him unique among the people of his day.

Romans 4:16 Therefore, ye are justified of faith and works, through grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed--not to them only who are of the law, but to them also who are of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

To this James would agree:

James 2

21 Seest thou how works wrought with his faith and by works was faith made perfect?

22 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.

23 Ye see then that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Faith is an exercise of obedience towards God, and it is a fundamental commandment that precedes Moses, but it was repeated by Jesus:

Mark 11:24 And Jesus spake and said unto him, Have faith in God.

When Abraham was commanded to do something, he did it. You may recall that the Lord commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering (see Genesis 22). Though the angel of the Lord intervened by preventing Abraham from killing his son, it was Abraham's offering of Isaac for this purpose that mattered. Note that we often read this term as "offer" as though to imply the completion of the sacrifice by the shedding of blood, but the true sacrifice was in bringing Isaac to that place and being willing to fulfill the word of God. That offering was completed without having shed blood. And true to the word of Abraham, God did indeed provide a sacrifice in the form of a ram that was stuck in the bushes.

Genesis 22

10 And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. So they went both of them together, and they came to the place of which God had told him.

11 And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac, his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.

12 And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

13 And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven and said, Abraham! Abraham! And Abraham said, Here am I.

14 And the angel said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him;

15 For now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only Isaac, from me.

16 And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked; and behold, behind a thicket, there was a ram caught in it by his horns.

17 And Abraham went, and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

Genesis 22

20 Thus saith the Lord, I have sworn by myself that because thou hast done this thing and hast not withheld thy son, thine only Isaac, from me,

21 That in blessing I will bless thee; and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is upon the seashore.

22 And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Jacob 3:6 And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son.

You see, the command was to offer his son, not to actually kill his son, though we might traditionally think that is what the sacrifice was. This was not the Lord changing his mind at the last minute, but was unbeknownst to Abraham a test of his willingness to lose something that was precious to him for the sake of something greater. And something greater is what he received. He became a friend of God.

We face challenges like this all the time – we have opportunities to do what God would have us to do, and we have to decide whether we will or won't do them. We may certainly not have these kinds of extreme examples every day, like Abraham had with Isaac, but it still sits with us to make decisions both small and great at various times.

Mercy is not something we earn. The sacrifices we offer the Lord are not equal pay for equal service. The Lord will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Rather, mercy is a blessing, a gift, or if you will, the measure of God's willingness to accept your sacrifice as a letter of intent to do righteousness from this time forward, but the actual sacrifice that satisfies the punishment of the law and makes mercy possible is the one offered by the Lord on Calvary between two thieves.

How will you choose to worship the Lord today? What will you do to offer up a broken heart and contrite spirit? What will you do that you might receive mercy? What will you do gain a greater understanding and appreciation for God that will bring him pleasure on account of your faith?

Will you begin by trying to understand what you need to do to both have and offer a contrite spirit, and to offer a broken heart?

Unlike the speed limit laws, we know that the law of Moses had an end, so we are not "shackled" by the details of performing these rather difficult ordinances. But our freedom

comes at the cost of living with an understanding of the meaning of true worship. This “enduring to the end” is what is commanded of us. It is the least we can do to please God.